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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: ENGAGING THE MEDIA TO DISPEL RUMORS ABOUT U.S.
ASSISTANCE

[11.](#) (SBU) SUMMARY. The election of Viktor Yushchenko as Ukraine's President has intensified suspicions and fueled rumors in Kazakhstan that U.S.-sponsored NGOs are here to support opposition political parties. There are widespread rumors that NGOs such as Soros Foundation of Kazakhstan (SFK), Freedom House, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) the International Republican Institute (IRI) and others directly finance political parties. Such rumors were given new impetus January 19 by Mazhilis (lower house of parliament) deputy Yerasyl Abylkasymov, who asked Kazakhstan's General Prosecutor to conduct inspections of Western-sponsored NGOs. Abylkaymov charged the latter with trying to bring about a "tulip revolution" in Kazakhstan. During recent weeks, Ambassador Ordway, USAID Central Asia Director George Deikun, and DAS Laura Kennedy have all conducted press outreach activities to address misperceptions and rumors about U.S. assistance programs.
END SUMMARY.

Ambassador Meets the Press

[12.](#) (SBU) On January 20, as part of his ongoing efforts to engage Kazakhstan's politically diverse media community, Ambassador Ordway invited six editors from official and pro-government newspapers to his residence. The purpose of the meeting was to hold an off-the-record discussion of any and all issues of interest to the editors. The editors began by asking the Ambassador what the "real reason" was that had led George Soros to invest so much money in Kazakhstan. They also asked why the U.S. insisted on "interfering" in the affairs of sovereign governments, like Ukraine.

[13.](#) (SBU) The questions revealed a prevailing cynicism about "democratic ideals" frequent among journalists who have spent their formative years working at Soviet-era media. In discussing George Soros' motives in pursuing democratic reform in the countries of the former Soviet Union, Ambassador Ordway noted the long tradition of philanthropy in the United States. He added that Soros grew up in Hungary and had witnessed how the Soviet Union had brutally crushed a popular uprising there against a communist dictatorship. The Ambassador said that Soros most likely had a sincere desire to help the people of the FSU countries in pursuing a transition to democracy. The editors dismissed this explanation. They suggested instead that Soros was motivated by his own dark profit motives, and, through the activities of his foundation, had basically fixed the election of Yuschenko in Ukraine.

[14.](#) (SBU) Ekspress K editor Adilkhan Nusupov formulated a unique metaphor to describe how countries should be allowed to pursue democratic reforms in their own way, comparing democracy to pizza. He said Kazakhstan was like a very young child, who had a huge pizza set in front of him, and who would eat the entire pie and die if not supervised and properly nourished. In its efforts to establish a democratic government, Nusupov said Kazakhstan should control the process by determining its own timetable, methodology, and path.

Mazhilis Deputy Attacks U.S. NGO's

[15.](#) (SBU) The debate on U.S. NGOs was given new impetus by an inquiry filed January 19 with the Procurator General, Rashid Tsubekov, by Mazhilis (lower house of parliament) deputy Yerasyl Abylkasymov. Abylkasymov, an outspoken and controversial politician, accused the Soros Foundation, the "non-governmental organization USAID," NDI, IRI, and Kazakhstan's International Bureau of Human Rights and Rule of Law, of spending over \$40 million to bring about a "tulip revolution" in Kazakhstan, modeled on similar "pro-Western, pseudo-democratic revolutions in Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine." Besides calling for the closing of political parties not meeting the legally required minimum number of members, he asked the prosecutor to conduct inspections of

all Western-sponsored NGOs involved in "making fools" of the public. Abylkasymov's remarks were widely repeated in Kazakhstan's wire services, television and print media.

USAID Director Replies

16. (SBU) At the request of the public affairs section, departing USAID Director for the Central Asian Region George Deikun hosted a January 19 on-the-record media roundtable. The session was attended by a dozen journalists, representing the full political spectrum, from state-owned media to opposition, both Russian and Kazakh, television, radio and print. Deikun opened the discussion by stating plainly that USAID and American NGOs do not and have never endorsed particular political parties or candidates, nor have they provided direct funding to parties or candidates.

From the Orange to the Tulip Revolution in One Easy Step

17. (SBU) Deikun's roundtable got good media coverage, much of it positive. As might be expected, stories published by progressive and opposition media led with Deikun's comments that the U.S. government does not fund political parties. However, media that had been raising the specter of a "tulip revolution" added a new spin to their conspiracy theories. Reporters asked who would replace Deikun, and when it turned out that his successor would be coming from Ukraine, they focused on this. The official government daily Kazakhstanskaya Pravda led with the headline "USAID - New Appointment." Pro-government Kazakh daily Aikyn titled its story: "The Christopher Crowley Who Arranged The Coup in Ukraine is Coming to Almaty." The latter daily also interviewed Abylkasymov, who said Crowley was being sent to Kazakhstan to organize the opposition.

DAS Kennedy: "No Political Parties Receive USG Funding"

18. (SBU) On February 4, EUR Deputy Assistant Secretary Laura Kennedy held a press conference in Astana, attended by six national and municipal television stations, radio and a variety of official and independent print media. She once again explained the role of NGO's sponsored by the U.S. Government: "No American NGO that is supported by our government would give special funding to any particular individual or party. They offer training, other advice across the political spectrum. They work always in accordance with the law of the host country, in this case Kazakhstan." When asked about whether presidential elections in Kazakhstan would "follow the Ukrainian scenario," she said, "With regard to Ukraine, every country follows its own development, its own rules, so we would look at Kazakhstan directly, without the filter of another country."

19. (U) The tone of the coverage varied according to the editorial style of the medium. Most broadcasts included Kennedy's remarks about not financing political parties, while the independent, centrist station Channel 31 led their report with this: "What is the status of democracy in Kazakhstan? This is the question Deputy Assistant Secretary Laura Kennedy will answer during her visit here."

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The tabloid station KTK tied Kennedy's visit to the "new team" at the State Department and emphasized Kennedy's assurances that U.S. foreign policy objectives would not change.

10. (U) Under the headline, "Miss Kennedy Took Kazakhstan's Pulse," Turkestan, a pro-government weekly, speculated that Kennedy's visit was to ascertain whether Kazakhstan would support U.S. military operations in Iran. "What is the reason for the third or fourth high level visit from the Bush administration in such intensely cold weather? It seems that after expressing condolences on the death of Kairat Kudabayev in Iraq (Note: Kudabayev, in Iraq as part of a 27 member Kazakhstani contingent in Iraq to dispose of ordinance, was killed on January 9, the first such Kazakhstani casualty. End note.), Bush now has sent Laura Kennedy to take Kazakhstan's pulse. The question she

probably has in mind: would Kazakhstan send troops if we started war in Iran?"

11. (SBU) Comment: The Mission will continue to engage the media here through the Ambassador's monthly press conferences, setting up press ops for visiting officials

and using other media outreach including interviews and op-eds. While we do not expect to receive a sympathetic or, at times, even a fair hearing from unfriendly media, the Mission believes such outreach is crucial in responding to increasingly strident "Tulip Revolution" rumors. In addition, such activities allow us to be pro-active in explaining and advocating U.S. foreign policy goals. The Mission also is doing all that it can to support Kazakhstan's beleaguered independent media.

12. Dushanbe minimize considered.

Ordway

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